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## COLUMBUS AND THE SANTA HERMANDAD IN 1492

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The series of useful volumes called "Makers of America," and prepared by scholarly pens, appropriately begins with *Christopher Columbus, His Life and His Work* by Charles Kendall Adams, at one time President of Cornell University. One would not interrupt the repose of a book written three and twenty years ago were it not that it has assisted, and by reason of its presence in libraries still assists in giving currency to a number of strange notions concerning the Discoverer of America.

"The reader," says President Adams, "will not go far in the perusal of this volume without perceiving that I have endeavored to emancipate myself from the thralldom of that uncritical admiration in which it has been the fashion to hold the Discoverer, ever since Washington Irving threw over the subject the romantic and bewitching charm of his literary skill."<sup>1</sup>

That the author has succeeded in freeing himself from many of the older conclusions will appear. It is not less evident that he has contrived to liberate himself from certain important canons of modern historical criticism. With all its advantages the spirit of contemporary scholarship has led more than one explorer into some Serbonian bog. It is well known that an intention of translating Navarrete led Irving to write his celebrated biography of Columbus. Dr. Adams, too, speaks of his constant use of the *Colección*. In a word, they were nursed upon the self-same hill.

The author does not mean to linger on the legends, but speedily to pass on into the realms of history. At the outset he asserts, p. 9, that Columbus "had considerable maritime experience of a very turbulent nature," and, he adds, "it is certain that he joined several of the expeditions of the celebrated corsairs bearing the same family name of Columbus." Eulogists, we are told, have hesitated to write the ugly word, but believing himself sustained by the state papers of the time, Dr. Adams, under the influence of the new wine, quotes the phrase "the pirate Columbus," to identify an adventurer of mature years, and states that to a younger man of the same name

<sup>1</sup> Preface, p. viii.

the archives allude in terms no more complimentary. Stripped of its verbiage the assertion of Mr. Adams is that in youth the Discoverer of America was a pirate. In passing we may pause to examine the accusation.

The vanity of Ferdinand Columbus appears to have been deeply wounded by a remark of Bishop Agostino Giustiano in his *Polyglot Psalter*, published at Genoa in 1516. In a note placed opposite one of the psalms this learned ecclesiastic says that the great Discoverer was *ortus vilibus parentibus*; that is, sprung from common parents. The Bishop, himself a native of Genoa, was a scholar of amazing industry and of remarkable linguistic attainments. His statement was in harmony with manuscript books then existing, and, no doubt, with popular knowledge concerning the family of Columbus. This reflection upon his ancestors led Ferdinand in writing a life of his father to attempt the construction of a family tree. In it he claimed kinship with certain distinguished seamen and with one of them sought to associate his father in a desperate sea-fight. This loyalty, indeed, is commendable, but alas for filial piety, the Columbus Junior alluded to was not a Genoese, a Ligurian or an Italian but a subject of Charles VIII, of France, and a member of a family in no way connected with Christopher Columbus or his ancestors. In the year 1485, when the famous fight occurred, the future Discoverer, dreaming on things to come, was concluding his long residence in Portugal and preparing to take his departure for Spain. The escape from fire and flood, which Ferdinand ascribes to his illustrious parent, would make a striking introduction to a romance, and the picture of the spent swimmer supporting himself with a friendly oar is almost Miltonic, but it is not history. Indeed, in our judgment the *Historia* of Ferdinand has contributed not a little to obscure the career of his father. It is proper to notice the fact that Dr. Adams has some doubt as to either the knowledge or the credibility of Ferdinand. Yet, as we shall see, he likes to believe the invention. The reader of English will find a sufficient discussion of this subject in Thacher, who names the documents and quotes from them.<sup>2</sup>

Not more substantial is the implication that Columbus was a man-hunter. President Adams writes: "During the fifteenth cen-

<sup>2</sup> *Columbus*, I, pp. 189-229.

tury the Portuguese were engaged in the slave-trade on the coast of Africa; and we are told that Columbus sailed several times with them to the coast of Guinea as if he had been one of them.”<sup>3</sup>

It is quite true that the disciples of Prince Henry had long been interested in the exploration and the civilization of the western coast of Africa and that oftentimes they forgot their ultimate object, the discovery of a route to India, in order to engage in the guilty traffic. But the slave-trade, which some writers consider the economic basis of those voyages, was no more than an incident in a lofty purpose. The motives of the Prince and of many of his countrymen are fully examined by Major.<sup>4</sup> Numbers of blacks from the tropics were forcibly carried to Portugal, instructed in the elements of Christianity, and returned to do missionary work among their friends. Slavery was not then what it afterward became. No human eye foresaw the mighty merchandise in negroes or the woes that the years were to bring forth. It is fancy rather than history to picture Columbus pursuing fugitive Africans or in an outbreak holding them under the hatches.

His obligations to Icelandic tradition concerning a western world may be briefly dismissed. First, there is no satisfactory evidence that he voyaged in Iceland's distant seas. If he had even vaguely heard of Vineland, he would have sailed northwest from Palos or, at any rate, toward the west. As a matter of fact, he sailed far to the south before he finally turned westward. Besides, he made no mention of such knowledge at court when he was pressing his application for the necessary equipment. The shadow of the pirate seems to darken all the tale. A paragraph, p. 14, observes: "He seems to have interlarded his more or less piratical expeditions on sea with the gentle experience of a bookseller and map-maker on the land." As Columbus was not a pirate, this awkward contrast loses all its point.

Still more grave is the accusation to come. It quotes a part of an extant holograph letter of the Admiral, preserved in the archives of the Duke of Veragua, which reads as follows: "I beg of you to take into consideration all I have written, and how I came from afar to serve these princes, *abandoning wife and children, whom for this reason I never afterward saw.*" Commenting upon this "la-

<sup>3</sup> *Christopher Columbus*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> R. H. MAJOR, *Prince Henry the Navigator*, *passim*.

mentable recital," as he styles it, Mr. Adams continues, "Columbus left Portugal, not only in poverty, but under circumstances which made it imprudent for him to return. We are obliged to infer that his wife and children were left in indigence. Neither in the numerous letters of Columbus nor in any of the records of the time is there any allusion to the death of the wife or of the children."

As to the charge of desertion, for that is what it amounts to, it may be said that the *Majorat*, which names Diego for the entail, speaks of *otros vuestros hijos*, *your other sons*. In brief, the Spanish sovereigns, in April, 1497, knew of two or more sons besides Diego. From whom could their Majesties have obtained this information but from Columbus himself? Again, in a letter dated Friday, December 13, 1504, written to Diego, the Admiral says: "Treat your brother—Ferdinand—as an elder brother should treat the younger. *You have no other brother.*" Evidently the child believed to have been living in Portugal in April, 1497, was known to be dead in 1504. What, if anything, the Discoverer had done for his forsaken wife and child we have no means of knowing. Neither the children nor their descendants, if any there were, figure in the famous lawsuit of later times as claimants for the honors or estates of the Admiral. To one not oppressed with the modern historical spirit the quoted passage furnishes a clue, and there are many other statements from which we might predicate his conduct. In the excerpt given, one may clearly perceive a sign of the Discoverer's affection and there are many other proofs of the existence of this quality. Moreover, it is evident from the manner in which he provides for the descent in his family of his honors and his rights. Even the most distant heirs are not overlooked and we may be reasonably certain that after securing the rights of Diego he would have made provision for his other son by Felipa Moniz Perestrello had such a son been then living and been eligible to assume the titles and estates of his distinguished father. As to his wife it is not conceivable that she was in necessitous circumstances, for she was not sprung from common parents, and from our undoubted knowledge of Columbus it may fairly be assumed that her interests would have been secured if she were still living. Furthermore, it should be remembered that upon his conduct the pen of Columbus has pronounced the sharpest censure. If he had abandoned and neglected his wife, he could hardly have expected for Diego a friendly reception or a

comfortable home from her married sister in Huelva. With this delinquency the Admiral does not charge himself. In another matter he is not sparing.

Piracy, desertion, slave-catching, falsehood, and even a graver crime give the reader of Mr. Adams' volume a notion of the seminaries in which the mind of Columbus was formed for the conception and the execution of his memorable project. Those who have pronounced panegyrics on the Discoverer do not maintain that his life was without blemish, but that he was a human being with human limitations. The most serious charge, his relations with Beatriz Enriquez, he does not attempt to palliate or to deny, but chooses to let it rest in the shade.

In another paragraph, p. 56, President Adams says: "Harrisse has found in the treasury-books memoranda of small amounts of money paid to Columbus from time to time during his stay in the vicinity of the Spanish Court." In vol. II, pp. 8-9, of Navarrete these expenditures are mentioned, and the fact raises a doubt as to whether Dr. Adams was as familiar with the *Colección* as the statement in his Preface would lead one to believe. Indeed, from what he says elsewhere, one is justified in asking whether he examined these entries at all. If he studied them, why did he not go farther? Had he done so, he would have come upon very interesting reading.

An unfamiliar document, also to be found in Navarrete, is the letter ascribed to King John, of Portugal, strongly urging Columbus to come into that kingdom for the benefit of his service. As that communication does not lie on the highways of learning, it may be given in full. Addressed "To Christopher Columbus our special friend in Seville," it is dated March 20, 1488, and reads:

"Christopher Columbus. We Don John, by the grace of God, King of Portugal, and both Algarves; and in Africa of this and that side of the sea, and Lord [*Senhor*] of Guinea send to you many greetings. We saw the letter that you wrote us; and we value very much the good will and affection for our service, that you show in it. And as for your coming here, we certainly believe, from what you say and for other reasons, that your ability and good genius will be very useful unto us; therefore we desire you to come and we will be very much pleased by seeing you; and in respect to you, we will arrange everything so that you may be pleased. And because you might perhaps feel afraid of our judges, because of any obligation, we, by this our letter, give assurance unto you, for your coming, stay,

and return hence, so that you could not be taken, retained, imprisoned, accused, sued nor demanded [questioned] for anything, whether it be civil, criminal, or anywise. And by the same [letter] we instruct our judges accordingly. Therefore we beg and entreat that your coming should be soon; and have no embarrassment whatever in coming: and we will reward and esteem it as a great service to us. Written in Avis the twentieth of March one thousand four hundred eighty-eight.—THE KING.”

Commenting upon this document, from which he gives but a brief excerpt, Mr. Adams remarks: “Color is given to the supposition that he [Columbus] was under grave charges of some kind by the fact that King John, when, some years later, writing him to return to Portugal, deemed it necessary to insure him “against arrest on account of any process, civil or criminal, that might be pending against him.”<sup>5</sup> Readers familiar with the life of Columbus know that after leaving Italy he dwelt for a time in Lisbon, where he was married; that he is said to have gone thence to Porto Santo, in the Canary Islands, and that, finally, about 1486, he left Portugal in haste. It is almost certain that he engaged in trade in the city of Lisbon, and it is possible that he may have failed. Such, at any rate, is the usual explanation of his sudden departure for Spain, and it may serve to make clear to the careful reader certain hints in the royal letter. Perhaps a still stronger reason was his disgust with the treatment that he had originally received in Portugal. The authenticity of the quoted letter is a controverted point, but its genuineness seems to be well supported.

The letter given above was the reply of King John to a request of Columbus for permission to return to Portugal. The protection seems to have been ample and the invitation urgent. Why, then, did not Columbus at once set out for Lisbon? The Spanish sovereigns appear, as shown by the records, to have bound him to their kingdoms by occasional allowances of money. In fact, he appears to have regarded Spain as his home, for the annals of Seville contain a statement of his having fought gallantly during one of the campaigns against the Moors. Nevertheless, he seems to have chafed under what their Majesties believed to be necessary delay. Early in 1488, when hope was pushed out of his life, the application was made to King John. As we have seen, that monarch’s response was

<sup>5</sup> *O. C.*, p. 41.

written March 20, 1488. Precisely when Columbus set out on his return to Portugal we do not know, but a memorandum supposed to be in his own handwriting shows him to have been at Lisbon in December of that year. By the 12th of May, 1489, if not earlier, he was back in Spain. Perhaps the high-astounding terms, which later imperiled his chances with Ferdinand and Isabella, made impossible any arrangement with King John. It is not established with certainty that he returned to Portugal. The entire subject of his search for a princely patron is carefully treated by Mr. Adams. Strange to say, it was by neglecting Navarrete that he has made his principal slip. Alonzo de Quintanilla, the Marchioness of Moya, and Luis de Santangel are properly named as the most influential friends of Columbus during the critical stage of his dreary way to success. Earlier he had found other and no less powerful intercessors.

President Adams dismisses as extremely improbable the legend that Isabella pledged her jewels to meet the cost of the proposed expedition, and he adds, "It was not necessary, for Santangel declared that he was ready to supply the money out of the treasury of Aragon."<sup>6</sup> Like the statements already noticed this does not indicate a constant or even frequent use of the *Colección de los Viajes y Descubrimientos*. Those volumes tell a plain unwrinkled tale which may with advantage be introduced by a few paragraphs from the neglected history of Spain, as told by Hume.

The story of the overthrow of the Spanish kingdoms, as well as the main facts in their re-conquest, is known to nearly all students of history. In this protracted struggle the nobles seized considerable power, but their encroachments were resented by the plain people. This was the situation which in 1295 led thirty-four towns to meet by deputy and to sign a solemn act of brotherhood under the title *Hermanidad de Castilla*. The incorporation signified that since the death of Alfonso X pillage and oppression had prevailed in Castile, and that for the defence of the royal authority and the repose of the kingdom the towns formed themselves into a confederacy with a common seal. There was a provision not only for periodical meetings, but for the raising, by joint exertion, of an armed force powerful enough to impose order upon the strongest of the nobility. If a member of the brotherhood suffered wrong, he was fully avenged. If even the king's officers transgressed, they were punished.

<sup>6</sup> o. c., p. 67.



The meetings of this important confederacy, to which scores of other towns soon adhered, were called extraordinary Cortes. They passed not only rules for their own protection but adopted laws which were sent to the sovereigns and were enforced as if they had been royal decrees. The victory of the towns over the aristocracy was not won in a night. The struggle, for a long time doubtful, was marked by extreme bitterness. The nobles brought themselves and their vassals into the jurisdiction of the towns, whose municipal government they captured or corrupted. In this contest the king supported both sides alternately, in order to hold the balance of power, and gained for himself the right of nominating mayors and aldermen. In the course of time, this undermined municipal independence and democratic national representation. In fact, it was one of the conditions which led in Spain to the ultimate establishment of a despotism. By this it is not meant that absolute power was always tyrannically used in that kingdom, but that it became possible so to exercise it.

When Isabella came to the throne, in 1476, the fortunes of the Castilian Crown were at their lowest. The royal revenues had been alienated, the royal justice corrupted or set at defiance, and the royal forces reduced to insignificance. In fact, Isabella's succession was disputed by a niece who was assisted by Portugal and favored by France. Factional nobles wasted or divided the towns. Though, for these reasons, the young Queen looked out upon a cheerless political landscape, it was not wholly a waste. In the first place, the alienations of the revenue were both irregular and unpopular; and in the second, the judicial power wielded by the nobles was a usurpation. As it had been selfishly exercised, and not for the welfare of their class, they were held together by no bond of union. If the Crown could only win them, the towns were rich and powerful. In a word, at the beginning of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella it was of interest both to town and Crown to establish order. By the joint use of harsh measures they speedily broke the spirit of the nobles. With her own resources Isabella extinguished private war. She razed unlicensed castles in Galicia and stopped the feuds that wasted Andalusía. All these measures were confirmed by the organization of the *Hermandad*.

The problem for the new monarchs, therefore, was to centralize in their own hands the dispersed political power of Castile. In its accomplishment they manifested much wisdom. Before the am-

bition of the nobles had produced anarchy, the strongest institutions as well as the most respectable had been the brotherhoods of the chief cities. These they revived for the purpose of raising a military police of 2,000 horse and a strong body of archers. This force, commanded by the king's brother, was to be supported by the towns, a tax of 18,000 maravedis being imposed upon every hundred householders.

The *Santa Hermandad*, *Holy Brotherhood*, as the institution was called, had its own courts of justice, whose magistrates were chosen by the confederated cities. They were empowered to decide without appeal all causes sent up by the *alcaldes* of the towns and villages. Almost immediately the roads were cleared of robbers. Without mercy and without delay the country generally was swept of malefactors. Plundering nobles as well as masters of degenerate military orders were dismayed. This had not been expected from the beautiful young Queen. Petitions and remonstrances alike were vain, for the Holy Brotherhood was more potent than any federation they could form, and Isabella was inflexible. Travelling on horseback with astonishing swiftness she seemed to be everywhere. Scores of sinister castles were levelled to the ground and their knightly owners, who had lived by rapine, fled as from the wrath to come.

As already noticed the *Hermandad* was at first a private association of towns and was suggested by the weakness of the executive. It had been directed against brigands, who infested the highways, against nobles hostile to towns, and sometimes against the Crown itself. By Isabella it was organized as a government institution. Its popular and representative character she wisely preserved. It was not, however, connected with the regular judiciary, but was rather a measure of police, supplementing criminal jurisdiction in country districts. Its chief object was to deal with acts of violence. There was a supreme Junta consisting of delegates from each province. They, and not the Crown, appointed provincial officials to try cases of first instance, and, what is of great interest in our inquiry, *to collect contributions*. Each village had one or more elected magistrates and, as stated, every hundred hearths maintained a mounted archer.

The system described, which brought the Crown into contact with every village in the land, was marvellously efficient. An offender was hunted from parish to parish, fresh relays of archers taking up

the hue and cry. The police possessed a perfect right of search; they could ransack suspected castles and force the gates of towns. When overtaken, the malefactor was haled to the scene of his crime and speedily punished. Minor offenders escaped with mutilation, while those guilty of graver crimes were set against a tree or a wall and shot to death.

As order became established the Hermandad was found to be both expensive and oppressive. In 1498, and the reader should mark the date, the Junta and the superior offices were abolished. It survived simply as an efficient police force, the members still electing minor magistrates and police sergeants. The methods of the Brotherhood were too severe to be completely popular. From Castile the Hermandad passed to Aragon, where it survived until the Cortes of 1510.

The work of the Brotherhood was done. In the language of the poet it had torn the flesh of captains and pecked the eyes of kings. Its achievements were not unconnected with Spanish greatness and Spanish grandeur. As will presently appear, one of its services is destined to be remembered by the most distant posterity. It was the *Santa Hermandad* which, for the sovereigns, financed the expedition that discovered America.

In a little volume entitled *Columbus and his Predecessors* the present writer has examined many of the legends, popular and scientific, concerning the equipment of the fleet of discovery. The remaining paragraphs, therefore, will not be a re-study of well established facts but rather an examination of the part taken in promoting the projects of the Spanish sovereigns by the *Santa Hermandad*. So far as we are aware this was the last memorable act of that ancient society. Its authority to collect contributions always left in its treasury funds with which to do its work. On these the sovereigns sometimes drew.

The preceding sketch has barely suggested the weary years of waiting that were passed by Columbus before he gained Isabella's approval of his project. His next task was to obtain the ships and the men. Around this subject there have grown up legends both grotesque and picturesque. Into their formation there have entered personal, ethnical, religious, and other elements. For example, there is no evidence that Aragon contributed toward the equipment so much as a single maravedi. Yet an historian of that country

claims that in its Treasury he found records proving that it was Ferdinand's kingdom that furnished the money for the expedition. Strange to say, entries visible to him have not, and can not be seen by other eyes. Family pride, too, has so skilfully fashioned an idle story that it has deceived not only historians but the teachers of historians, for Dr. Adams believed in the contributions of the Pinzons. In the essay already mentioned the present writer has examined this subject and it may therefore be suffered to pass without further observation.

In the *second edition* of Navarrete, which was published in 1859, is found, Vol. II, 9, a paragraph that has proved a stumbling-block to not a few beginners in this field of historical research. It reads as follows:

"En otro libro de cuentas de Luis de Santangel y Francisco Pinelo, Tesorero de la Hermandad desde el año 1491 hasta el de 1493, en el finiquito de ellas, se lee la partida siguiente:

"'Vos fueron recibidos é pagados en cuenta un cuento é ciento é cuarenta mil maravedis que distes por nuestro mandado al Obispo de Avila, que agora es Arzobispo de Granada, para el despacho del Almirante D. Cristóbal Colon.'"

This record may be rendered:

"In another book of accounts of Luis de Santangel and Francisco Pinelo, Treasurer of the Brotherhood from the year 1491 to 1493, in the discharge of them, is read the following entry:

"'You have received and paid on account one million and one hundred and forty thousand maravedis, which you gave by our order to the Bishop of Avila, who is now Archbishop of Granada, for the equipment of the Admiral, Don Christopher Columbus.'"

The entry here reproduced is correctly quoted by Navarrete, but in his paragraph introducing it there is an evident error. The expression "*Tesorero de la Hermandad*" (*Treasurer of the Brotherhood*) is a grammatical absurdity, for it is incorrect to speak of Santangel and Pinelo as *Treasurer*. The passage should read, as it does in the first edition of Navarrete, "*Tesoreros de la Hermandad*" (*Treasurers of the Brotherhood*). Las Casas says that Santangel borrowed 1,000,000 maravedis for the Sovereigns, but he fails to indicate the source. The entry quoted supplies this deficiency. Nor is this the only record of the transaction, for immedi-

ately following that given above Navarrete, familiar, it seems, in prefaces, adds another:

“En otro libro de cuentas de Garcia Martinez y Pedro de Montemayor de las composiciones de Bulas del Obispado de Palencia del año de 1484 en adelante, hay la partida siguiente:

“Dió y pagó mas el dicho Alonso de las Cabezas (Tesorero de la Cruzada, en el Obispado de Badajoz) por otro libramiento del dicho Arzobispo de Granada, fecho 5 de Mayo de 92 años, á Luis de Santangel, Escribano de Racion del Rey nuestro Señor, é por él á Alonso de Angulo, por virtud de un poder que del dicho Escribano de Racion mostró, en el cual estaba inserto dicho libramiento, doscientos mil maravedis, en cuento de cuatrocientos mil que en él, en Vasco de Quiroga, le libró el dicho Arzobispo por el dicho libramiento de dos cuentos seiscientos cuarenta mil maravedis que hobo de haber en esta manera: un cuento y quinientos mil maravedis para pagar á D. Isag Abrahan por otro tanto que prestó á sus Altezas para los gastos de la guerra, é el un cuento ciento cuarenta mil maravedis restantes para pagar al dicho Escribano de Racion en cuenta de otro tanto que prestó para la paga de las carabelas que sus Altezas mandaron ir de armada á las Indias, é para pagar á Cristóbal Colon que va en la dicha armada.”

“In another book of accounts of Garcia Martinez and Peter of Montemayor constituting Bulls of the Bishopric of Palencia from the year 1484 and onward, there is the following entry:

“Furthermore, the said Alonso de las Cabezas (Treasurer of the Crusades in the Bishopric of Badajoz) gave and paid by another warrant of the said Archbishop of Granada, made on the 5th of May in the year 1492 to Luis de Santangel, Escribano de Racion of the King, our Lord, and through him to Alonso de Angulo, by virtue of an authorization which he exhibited from the said Escribano de Racion, in which was inserted the said warrant, 200,000 maravedis on account of 400,000 paid to Vasco de Quiroga, which the said Archbishop paid by the said warrant of 2,640,000 maravedis which he was to receive in this manner: 1,500,000 maravedis to pay to D. Isag Abrahan for a like sum which he loaned to their Highnesses to carry on the war, and the 1,140,000 maravedis remaining to pay the said Escribano de Racion on account of a like sum which he loaned to pay for the caravels which their Highnesses ordered to go as a fleet to the Indies, and to pay to Christopher Columbus, who goes [went] on the said fleet.”

The records quoted, and several others relating to this interesting event, show clearly that Luis de Santangel, acting in a ministerial

capacity, advanced to the Crown a sum of money which, with interest amounting to 140,000 maravedis, was afterward repaid to the Treasurers of the *Santa Hermandad*. In a word, there is not the slightest doubt that seven eighths of the money necessary for the equipment was advanced by the Holy Brotherhood, at that time an institution forming a part of the Spanish government. From what source Columbus derived his share we do not know, and nothing is to be gained by adding to conjecture.

Mr. Adams is not the only considerable historian who has taken a short cut to the completion of his book, for John Fiske, too, who was almost face to face with a frowning fact, did not persevere, and, apparently because of haste, allowed on this subject an ingenious speculation to find a place in his splendid work entitled the *Discovery of America*. There it remains, raising in certain minds a phantom of hope.

CHARLES H. MCCARTHY, PH. D.

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